MODERN ATHEISM,

ITS

POSITION AND PROMISE.

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MODERN ATHEISM

ITS POSITION AND PROMISE

BEING

THE FERNLEY LECTURE OF 1877

BY E. E. JENKINS, M.A.

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MODERN ATHEISM, Etc.

The subject of this Lecture was chosen for me by a late honoured and beloved friend whose death is the heaviest of the many Connexional bereavements of this year. He was pleased to think that I might expose the logical inconsistencies and the grave practical hazards of modern unbelief: and he looked forward to the execution of the duty allotted to me, and to the delivery of the Lecture here to-day, with an interest which, while it flattered my insufficient talents, encouraged the exertions by which the work, such as it is, has been done. To miss his presence at this moment, and the greeting of his approval at the end of my task, is to finish it in the shadow of death. No man among us was more alive to the perils of speculative licence on the Theism of Christianity than Mr. Perks. His various and careful reading in the literature of theological polemics, made him an able disputant on questions that occupy the border-land of revelation and philosophy: and as a defender of what he believed to be the truth, no one exceeded him in the courage and sincerity of his loyalty to the great Rabbi and Lord of all. That he was right while he lived is proved, so far, by the strength and consolation of his convictions when he died.

Those who are able to appreciate the difficulty of bringing within the compass of a lecture even the bare outlines of our subject, will be ready to accord to me the encouragement of their sympathy. I shall be deeply thankful if I can add

anything to the argument of a personal God which shall meet even the temporary requirement of that argument, and check, within such circles as we may be able to command, the insidious advances of what threatens to be one of the most destructive blights which ever fell upon the Vine of the Lord of Hosts. It will be remembered that that which is now challenged by those who have influence in letters and science, is the foundation of all Christian doctrine, and of all ethical teaching: for that which we believe to be the fountain of moral power, that upon which we have built up the government and order of our families, that which is the home of the loveliest and most sacred of our associations, that which is the inspiration of whatever is sublime in the hopes, the imaginations, and the charities of mankind, will perish with the doctrine of a personal God.

The present condition of philosophical and religious thought cannot for any practical advantage be understood, unless we consider that human opinions like human manners are subject to periodic fashions. They have the run of a season, like a mode or style, disappear, and return to favour to repeat a similar history. While they retain their popularity they rule the public mind with the authority of truth itself: and our danger is lest, during their perilous though temporary ascendency, we should loosen our hold of some unchangeable verity; which may be hidden, and even for a time lost, but can never move of itself and can never be moved. We have an illustration of this remark in the fashion of accepting speculations of science as if they were discoveries. The unusual triumphs which have crowned recent scientific labours have tempted certain thinkers to push their way beyond the firm ground of inductive evidence into regions of thought where scientific methods cannot be applied; and the reputation which they have justly won in their own field has

given weight and currency to whatever ulterior opinions they are pleased to countenance. The error which is just now contending for renown is the atheistic foundation of the Universe. Certain materialists, with eminent inconsistency, have given a scientific shape to what is after all a mere guess projected beyond what is proved. That which our fathers considered a daring and wicked thought has been introduced into important or respectable speculations, as if it were the sequence of scientific experiment; and it has passed into popular literature as identified with the progress of the human mind. We know that in that progress it must disappear; but meanwhile the flood may submerge us before the tide turn; and it becomes those whose homes lie near the currents of public opinion, to guard their property against a threatened inundation.

If we understand the position of materialism as against theology, it is the denial of the knowledge of God, on the ground that that knowledge is impossible; in other words, we are made atheists, either really, by the fact that there is no God, or relatively, by the limits of our understanding making any certainty on the subject unattainable. Let us state at once that the conception we attach to the word GOD is that of a primal Mind; for if our reasoning cannot carry us to the demonstration of a first *intelligence*, then, though we may admit such phrases as FIRST CAUSE, and, THE ORIGINAL OF ALL FORCES, it leaves us atheists. I do not see how the position is relieved by advancing it to the unknown and the unknowable. If nothing can be known by the human mind in regard to the question of God's existence, the intellectual state of the world is atheism, and has always been atheism. There is a popular stigma cleaving to the word atheist or atheism; but to allow a prejudice of this kind to interfere with exact expression, will only add another difficulty and a

serious one to those which already beset this discussion. I shall take atheism to mean the non-recognition of a first originating Mind; whether it arise from the persuasion that there is no such Mind; or from the scepticism which leaves the question among merely abstract possibilities.

My purpose in this lecture is to examine the proposition *that it is impossible for the human mind to know that there is a God.* Those who maintain this proposition can hardly mean that they have discovered the exact limits of the human understanding, and the nature and ultimate range of all phenomena, material and intellectual, that can possibly affect the judgment of the mind in determining for itself the question of the existence of God; and yet the assertion seems to need the warrant of this extraordinary and impossible condition. But suppose it means simply that this knowledge has never yet been certainly attained; and it must express so much, if it comprehend no more. It is then affirmed that at no period of its history has the mind of man found sufficient evidence in any region or source of knowledge, to justify belief in an intelligent first cause of all things and distinct from all things, in a word, God, the Creator of all things: that there may be such a Being, but that the most advanced researches in the world of matter and of mind leave the decision of the question undetermined. Assuming that this position of the Scientists is unassailable, from their review of the history of all philosophies, and all religions, and all races, are they prepared to say that in the future development of mental power, among the wonders yet in store for reason, for experiment, and for faith, there may not be discoveries that shall free this question from its present difficulties, and make it possible for an ever-progressing science to declare in some future period the origin or authorship of the Creation? In reflecting upon the achievements

of philosophy during this century, than which no Eastern fable ever conceived greater marvels, it may not be absurd to suppose that man will yet learn by proofs which even science will be compelled to admit whether he has a Maker or no. If the time should ever come when that which is now in doubt shall be positively known, then supposing the discovery refute conclusively the proposition that there is a God, an immemorial and universal illusion which has had more power over the destinies of the human race than all the sciences, will disappear, and the education of mankind will have to begin again: if, on the other hand, the proposition be affirmed, the truth that God exists will have been anticipated by an idea of God, which dates at least from the earliest historic times; and all the great results which can be supposed possible when the truth is known, will have been already accomplished by the idea.

If we were not allowed to hope for the future of our race in regard to this great question; if it were to be maintained that it does not admit of demonstration, and that no consistent scientific thinker can assent to any argument that may be advanced in proof of a Creator: it would follow that if there be a Creator, and surely the hypothesis will be allowed us, He, the builder of our mind, has made it impossible for us to know with certainty that He exists. Let us examine this hypothesis, which we claim to do, not merely to find the issue of a particular line of reasoning, but because the position of the materialists invites us to consider that as possible which is not in itself inherently absurd, nay, which, in view of certain considerations that may be alleged in its favour, is not altogether improbable.

Accepting then hypothetically the conception of a distinct and independent power, apart from Nature, the Original and Providence of all other existence, we know absolutely nothing

concerning Him. We are the only creatures who are capable of conceiving an idea of God, and of reasoning upon that idea; and yet we are as much cut off from the knowledge of His mind, using that word as expressing the highest type of existence known to us, as other forms of animal life. All intuitions and feelings which, taking kindly to the idea of a God, would at first seem to indicate that they were intended to lead us to Him, must be inflexibly distrusted; for, whatever account we may give of them, they were never meant to inspire hopes of a knowledge which is made impossible by the constitution of our mind. But we have an idea of a God; and it must be further acknowledged that this idea has come to the different races of mankind in much the same manner. The impression of a causal force, intelligent and supreme, has been, in forms more or less rudimentary, the heritage of the common human mind from, at least, historic periods. And if God had intended that we should certainly know that He exists, instead of intending that we should not know it, it is difficult to conceive how He could otherwise have taught us the fact than by those modes of conveying an impression of Himself which are the phenomena of nature, and the mental susceptibilities by which such phenomena are instinctively referred to a Creator. For, observe, this is precisely the manner in which we learn other things that we were certainly intended to know. We were formed, no matter how, to live in successive generations; and it is in the order of nature that the people of each generation should prosper in family and social life: that they should work in individual duty and organic concert for the order, safety, and happiness of the many. We are first guided to these obligations by intuitions; and then by registering our experiences we formulate them into laws and institutions to give stability to the teachings of nature, and to secure a perpetual obedience

to her commands. This is the process by which families expand into communities. The earliest phenomena of social life impress us at once as do the simple aspects of matter; and having certain feelings, such as love, caution, resentment, and trust, answerable to the necessities of society, we gradually mature a system of mutual help which is the basis of all forms of national existence.

This account of the origin of society is not discredited by the condition of uncivilised races. Their tribal forms are eccentric offshoots from the root of nations. There is no speculation upon which we are so liable to err as the amount of intelligence possessed by man in purely barbarian conditions. It is only by a patient and wary observation, which nothing but a residence among them will enable the inquirer to make, that we can form a just judgment concerning those remote races that live outside the boundary of civilisation. If we follow the best authorities in this field of research, than which no subject deserves more careful examination, we shall find that underneath their grossest superstitions and their monstrous excesses, there is a sentiment which culture would have made noble, and an instinct which knowledge would have made useful. Here then we become families and nations by natural and universal feelings, impulses, and faculties. The conditions in which they spring and act and the organism they make for themselves, will necessarily produce varieties of type; for these are largely determined by climate, by numbers, and by opportunities of transit: yet when diverging most widely from each other, when, at first sight, every trace of identity has disappeared, the carefully renewed observation will perceive the elementary forms of social and interdependent life. Wherever you place human beings, wherever you find them, society with its fellowships, its industries, and its guards, is a development as inevitable as the produce

of a seed. That produce may be a partial, or even total, failure,—a contingency too common in the fortunes of seed; but whatever becomes of it, it is intended to grow, since there is provision for growth in the structure of the grain itself.

Now if it can be shown that the notion of a Supreme God has been formed by the same process as the notion of primal natural states, that is to say, by the reciprocal action of phenomena and intuitions, then, assuming the position of the materialist, the logic of our analogy will lead us to the conclusion that we are taught by the framer of our mind to distrust the impressions which would lead us to Himself, and as implicitly to follow those which lead us to each other.

In pursuing this argument it will be our business to examine the earliest rudiments of religious belief. The remains of any primitive faith will serve our purpose; for all such relics belong to the argument. The field is too large to be traversed in a lecture: but in making a selection from many examples, we shall examine those religions which are distinguished in two features, unquestionable antiquity, and the trace of a cultivation sufficient to give authority to human thought, and yet anterior to the age of expositors and systems. It may be convenient for us to keep Biblical records in the background, for the present. Excepting these authorities, our most pertinent illustrations come from the original Vedas of the Hindus. The antiquity of these writings is unimpeachable: but the conceptions embodied in them are older still, leading us back even to the child days of the human race. India is the birthplace of theistic speculation and intellectual science. The philosophical systems of Europe have grown from the seed-plots of the East. The familiar assumptions of India become discoveries when they reach Germany and France; and accepted scientific doctrines by the time they arrive in England. It is not my intention to discuss at

length the chronology of the Vedic era: much less does it concern me to follow the development of Vedic faith into later forms of popular mythology. I shall produce the earliest religious thoughts of the earliest Aryan period. That period within the present limits of research may not admit of accurate computation. But as much as this is evident, that in Vedic literature there are several strata of writing, distinguishing intervals of growth and change as plainly as varieties of style and thought separate the Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth periods of English poetry. The oldest specimens of Vedic composition are the original hymns: in fact these and nothing else comprise the Vedas proper; the other productions that borrow the sacredness and authority of their name being, 1st, instructions and rubrics on the ritual of the ancient invocations; and, 2ndly, commentaries and treatises to elucidate their meaning. The date of these latter writings carries us back to about 600 years before Christ; and the earlier period, when the ritualistic arrangement of the hymns brought them into an order and system of worship, cannot be later than 1000 years before the Christian era. As for the hymns themselves, even they are divided into ancient and modern: and probably the earliest of them were composed 3,500 years ago. Here are examples of this historical element taken from the hymns of the Rig Veda. "Ye have done great things, O Maruts (winds), when our fathers' hymns were sung of old in your honour." [1] "They praised the pure god with an ancient song." "Indra (Lord) who has grown through ancient, middle, and modern hymns." [2]

Thanks to the munificence of the late East India Company, a generosity which has been nobly sustained by the present Government, and to the scholarship of Colebrooke, Wilson,

[1] R.V. vii. 56, 23, Muir's *Sanscrit Texts*, part iii. 125.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 123.

Müller, and others, we have authentic texts of the Indian Scriptures, and they teach—

1. The existence of a Supreme God.

It may be worth while to notice that the origin of the Vedic hymns is always supposed to be revelation. The manner of the revelation was a fruitful source of speculative writing. The Hindu imagination found a congenial task in conceiving how not merely the thoughts but the letters that clothed them were brought from eternity into time. Passing over the grotesque and absurd systems of inspiration founded by subsequent writers, we may take the moderate pretensions of the poets themselves. They tell us they fabricated the hymns; but the thoughts entered into them: as one of them says, in a line of great beauty,

"When the voice entered into me, I gave it birth."[1]

In language of this kind the sentiment of inspiration pervades the primitive Muse of India, and is carried beyond what is supposed to be the *afflatus* of mere poetical genius. The Hindus understand the fervour of a natural fire as the source of all genuine poetry: but the Vedas have a distinct and lonely eminence, looking down upon all human compositions; they are God-born. The Bible among ourselves is not more distinct from all literature, in the place assigned to its supreme authority, than, in the estimation of the Hindus, are the Vedas. In making our extracts from Vedic writings to prove that the Aryan sages were led by meditation to apprehend a Creator, we shall first cite from the hymns themselves, and then subjoin quotations from the prose chapters of the sacred books.

Here is an example of the early minds of the race feeling after a First cause:

"Who knows exactly, and who shall in this world declare,

[1] R.V. vii. 56, 23, Muir's *Sanscrit Texts*, part iii. 152.

whence and why this creation took place? The gods are subsequent to the production of this world: then who can know whence it proceeded? or whence this various world arose? or whether it uphold itself or not? He who in the highest heaven is the Ruler of this universe does indeed know, but not another can possess that knowledge."[1]

In the following passage, the mind goes back into the nothing that precedes entity; and as it is led by a nobler stimulus than curiosity, so it seems to take with it a diviner light than mere reason: "There was no entity, nor non-entity; no world, nor sky, nor aught above it. . . . Death was not; nor then was immortality; nor distinction of day or night. But THAT breathed without afflation: . . . other than Him, nothing existed which since has been. Darkness there was: for this universe was enveloped with darkness, and was undistinguishable like fluids mixed in waters: but that mass, which was covered by the husk, was at length produced by the power of contemplation. First desire was formed in his mind: and that became the original productive seed; which the wise, recognising it by the intellect in their hearts, distinguish, in nonentity, as the bond of entity."[2] It is a question we cannot discuss here, whether, and how far, these meditations were indebted to traditions of what we believe to be the true account. Their resemblance to each other, whether coincident or organic, will equally serve the argument which these extracts are intended to support. Of the next quotations, especially the first, it might almost be supposed that they were verses from a new translation of the Book of Job:

"Agni held the earth,
He established the heavens by truthful words."[3]

[1] Colebrooke's *Essays on the Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus*, p. 17.
[2] Colebrooke's *Essays*, etc., 17.
[3] Rig Veda, i. 67, 3, Müller.

> "Varuna stemmed asunder the wide firmaments,
> He lifted on high the bright and glorious heaven:
> He stretched out apart the starry sky and the earth." [1]

We now proceed to another part of the Rig Veda, one of the prose lectures bound up with the hymns, and a specimen of one of the earliest attempts to expand into some detail what was understood to be the condensed and oracular teaching of the divine poetry. "Originally this (universe) was indeed SOUL only: nothing else whatsoever existed, active (or inactive). He thought, 'I will create worlds:' thus He created these various worlds; water, light, mortal (beings), and the waters. That water is the (region) above the heaven, which heaven upholds: the atmosphere comprises light; the earth is mortal; and the regions below are the waters." "He thought, 'These are indeed worlds: I will create guardians of worlds.' Thus he drew from the waters and framed an embodied being (*purusha*)." [2] The word *purusha* signifies man. There follows a fantastic account of the processes by which the organs of the human body were gathered into its frame and symmetry, and their functions assigned to them; but these descriptions are beside our present purpose; one question put into the mouth of the great Framer when He had finished the human body is worth our notice: "He (the universal soul) reflected, 'How can this body exist without me?' . . . Parting the suture He penetrated by this route." [3] Who when they hear these wonderful divinings of patriarchal paganism can help recalling the words, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"? [4] Another Vedic text is a remarkable affirmation of the unity and omniscience of God, "Brahme is truth, the one immutable Being. He is truth and everlasting knowledge." [5]

[1] R.V. vii. 86, 1, Müller. [2] Colebrooke's *Essays*, etc., 26.
[3] *Ibid.*, 28. [4] Gen. ii. 7. [5] *Ibid.*, 87.

It is sufficiently plain, judging from these extracts, that the Aryan idea of God was not the superstition of fear, but the induction of reason. The mind following its intuitions, and jointly with these the impressions awakened by the great powers and appearances of nature, was compelled to place an intelligent and omnipotent will behind the creation ; and only one will. In attempting to construct a cosmogony, a science to explain the plan of the creation of the universe, the mind necessarily fabled its conceptions : selected from nature certain images of vastness, brightness, and fecundity ; animated them with inferior gods, and distributed these celestial ministers over the domains of matter, and through the darker realms of destiny. But it is always assumed that one Mind originated all things. The polytheism of India is unknown in the Vedas : for although the invocations addressed to different elements might appear to countenance an impression of as many deities ; yet as equal powers are attributed to all, as all are highest, and mightiest, and wisest, it is probable that the homage of the worshipper was absorbed in the particular aspect of the One God which he was for the time invoking. Max Müller on this important inquiry quotes the following lines from the Rig Veda :

"They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni. . . . That which is One the wise call it in divers manners." And again, "Wise poets make the beautiful-winged, though he is one, manifold by words." [1]

It is worthy of note that the authority of the Vedas on the doctrine of the unity of God has not only survived the later and more popular mythologies of Braminism, but this doctrine actually underlies them ; and may be found in the central thought of nearly all the superstitions of India. I except Buddism, which is not properly a religion at all, and

[1] Müller's *Lecture on the Vedas*, p. 29.

to which I shall return when we consider the ethical power of a belief in the existence of God. I may add also a fact of much significance, that the culture of the modern Hindu race is in the direction of a more thorough investigation of Vedic writings; and that the first minds of the East are endeavouring to purify the sources of Hindu Theism; to go back through the gross accumulations of metaphysics and legend to the springs of Aryan thought. We know that they must go even higher than Aryan thought: but those of us who are striving to lead them *unto living fountains of water, where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more,* regard this impatient desire for the purest truth they can find, as an unequivocal and gladdening sign of an approaching renovation for the people of India. If the limits of a lecture permitted it, we might extend this examination of ancient faiths; and the result would confirm the Vedic witness. The cosmogonies of ancient Egypt, of Phenicia, of Chaldæa, and of Persia, show a curious resemblance to each other in the intuitions and subsequent speculations of the earliest cultured races. There is the same idea of an intelligent power, the author of all beginnings, therefore Himself unproduced; and the same disposition to piece out a Genesis by exaggerations of known prolific forces.

2. The Vedas teach, with the doctrine of a Supreme God, *the immortality of the soul.* As the intuition of causal force suggested to Aryan thinkers the first mind, the qualities of mind suggested indestructibility; and with the conception of it thus begotten, the concurrent longing for it confirmed their faith. Their notion of the sovereignty of mind over matter is an intensely interesting speculation; and derived from an idea that the human mind is a pattern of the divine. They imagined that by intense and continued meditation upon God, or some kindred subject, a man might attain supernatural

power; his will triumphing over material resistance with the easy freedom of the God he mused on. He could penetrate the minds of other men, pierce the future, and suspend any natural law that happened to be in his way. Before we speak further of the philosophical mind of India which was subsequent to the Vedic muse, let us consider the earlier and more authoritative teaching of the hymns themselves on the immortality of the soul. Here is an extract from a prayer addressed to Soma, a popular Vedic god with whom was the gift of future felicity:—

1. "Where there is eternal light, in the world where the sun is placed, in that immortal imperishable world place me, O Soma!

2. "Where life is free, in the third heaven of heavens, where the worlds are radiant, there make me immortal!

3. "Where there is happiness and delight, where joy and pleasure reside, where the desires of our desire are attained, there make me immortal!" [1]

But there are strains in the Vedas which speak out not only primitive impressions of God and the immateriality of the soul, but those feelings of responsibility, of dependence, and of guilty imperfection, which suppose a knowledge of sin and the hope of pardon. The questionings of doubt in some of these hymns are extremely touching: the refrain of one of them is the inquiry, "Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?" The reply is given in each verse; and yet the question as often returns, craving more illumination; while successive answers expatiate on the perfections which invite confidence and hope. "He who gives life, whose shadow is immortality, whose shadow is death. He to whom heaven and earth, standing firm by His will, look up, trembling inwardly. He who alone is God, above all gods." The

[1] R.V. ix. 113, 7, Müller.

plaintiveness of the last verse is a natural effect of these descriptions: "May He not destroy us, He the Creator of the earth; or He, the righteous, who created the heaven."[1] Our last example of these prayers is an exquisite psalm which it would be hard to match. There are many so-called Christian hymns which are inferior in sense, in music, and in piety, to the following Vedic litany:—

1. "Let me not yet, O Varuṇa, enter into the house of clay; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

2. "If I go along trembling, like a cloud driven by the wind; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

3. "Through want of strength, thou strong and bright god, have I gone wrong; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

4. "Thirst came upon the worshipper, though he stood in the midst of the waters; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

5. "Whenever we men, O Varuṇa, commit an offence before the heavenly host, whenever we break the law through thoughtlessness; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!"[2]

In these curious and recently discovered writings we have the thoughts and the aspirations, in its infancy, of a race whose descendants comprise the most powerful and accomplished nations of Europe and Asia. They were uttered at a time when the human mind might be expected to receive the truest impressions of nature. Science is the growth of culture. The investigations that command exact results are very slowly matured; and men can live and prosper without them. But everything concerning life itself, the sources of its purity, the guardianship of its rights, the cultivation of its social obligations, and all the network of duties which fence and harmonise its conduct, must begin when life begins. We look for these in the twilight dawn of history, and we find them: and they remain among the unchanged elements of human society.

[1] R.V. x. 121, Müller. [2] *Ibid.* vii. 8, 9.

Now the materialist, in dealing with these primitive lessons, accepts those that inculcate the ethics of life, truth between man and man, purity in families, obedience to parents, loyalty to governments, and the charities of benevolence; but he repudiates those that lead the mind with equal directness and authority to a Creator, to faith, and to worship: these are the illusions of poetry; admirable for their ingenuity and elegance, but having no doctrinal value. But what gives their warrant to ethical lessons? The fact that they are the suggestions of nature revised and enforced by experience. May not as much be said to support a similar warrant for the aspirations of faith? Their teaching is equally primal, clear, and unanimous. Again, if we are to distrust the ancient theologies and to receive the ancient ethologies, how comes it to pass that the latter, which expound the doctrines relating to character, are for the most part built upon the former, which are speculations relating to God? There is no ethical system of any repute, none which has been accepted by communities, that has not borrowed its sanctions from a supposed Supreme power.

It may surprise some of you that I dare venture such a statement with Buddism in front of me. The Budda found his ethics; he did not produce them. He grafted them upon a stock which he hoped had life; but they perished in the arctic atmosphere of atheism. I am bound to account for the early prosperity of the system. In the age of the Budda, Hinduism had lost its Vedic simplicity. It had become a vast sacerdotal power. It crushed beneath the heel of its tyranny the freedom of the intellect and the freedom of the person. It arrogated the omnipotence of heaven, and administered the destinies of fate. The complexion of every man's inner and outer life, the condition of every man's family, the produce of industry, the laws of fruitfulness, the visitations

of blight, the scourges of pestilence and war, the benedictions of health and peace, were in the gift or the dispensing power of the Bramins. They fattened upon the liberties of the people. Budda was the Luther of a new movement; and his success is at once explained by the posture in which he found the masses. They were waiting for the voice and arm of a redeemer; and Budda appeared. His rank commanded a hearing, for he was a king's son: and not being a Bramin, it gave the more emphasis to his defiance of Braminical imposture. He perceived that that imposture was built upon supposed supernatural powers; he denied the existence of such powers. The good sense and simplicity of his teaching enabled men to look once more upon nature without fear: the cloud had lost its demon, the lightning its vengeful aim; there was no terror outside the mind; the mind was its own universe, its own sun and stars, the arbiter of its own fate. Everything depended upon the conduct of man himself. He could make his own heaven, and his own hell. Here was nature: the basis of a true philosophy. There was no distinction of caste and no inequality of sex. No wonder that the new reformation, as its principles and purpose began to be understood, was hailed by the victims of the insolent and unsparing oppression of Braminical rule. Its propagation, moreover, was a part of its system; and in this feature it differed from its rival. No other institution, with the single exception of Christianity, ever raised itself above the frontier walls of race and planned the conquest of the world; and the grand swiftness of its march through Burmah, Siam, Thibet, China, and Japan, is due to the nature it carried with it; to the realism of its mission, restricting itself absolutely to the improvement of man; and to the catholicity of its spirit. It tolerated all opinions and assimilated to itself all thought. In China it accepted the ethics of Confucius; in Japan it

looked kindly upon the superstitions of Shintooism; while its rigorous morality commanded the reverence of thinkers and invited the protection and co-operation of governments. But as its early strength was in its ethical teaching, unencumbered by the tyrannising fictions of idolatry, its weakness lay in the repudiation of the theism from which in the first place its ethics had been derived. It separated ethics from God; and the branch lived on, because it was full of vitality; but cut off from the root death was only a question of time. The unnatural divorce was soon apparent in the attempt to substitute for God another being to whom the reverence of believers should be offered, and by whose example and sanctions the motives of obedience should be inspired: that being was none other than Budda himself! The system gathered to itself features which define a religion, and concealed so effectually its original atheism that none but scholars could discern it; and even among these there are sects representing totally opposite views. As for the masses, they are to this day worshippers of Budda, and possess a priesthood, a ceremonial, and a sacred literature, which provide as completely for man's religious sympathies and hopes as Braminism itself. It was its atheism which drove Buddism out of India, and it has never returned; nor will it ever again take root in the land: for although it has acquired certain aspects which correspond with the doctrines and ritual of Hinduism, its modern additions are not wanted among a people already "joined to idols;" and its ancient simplicity, even if this could be recovered, has been condemned by history, whose judgment will not soon be disturbed by a new trial.

It follows from all this that Buddism does not embarrass but support our position, that the laws of conduct have been found ineffective when not backed by the unseen but ever present authority of a supernatural lawgiver. But if worship

is false and morals are true, why should the false be the inspiration and sustaining power of the true? Is it not rather probable that both are true, or that both are false? For what is worship? Adoration of the power supposed to be above us. It includes the contemplation of that which is more excellent than ourselves: of that, indeed, which is perfect in excellence. We look out from our own limits upon the illimitable; from our own helplessness and exposure upon an all-sheltering and paternal power: we think of all beauty as originating here; of all bounty as running down from this source; of all wisdom as springing from this unknown intelligence; of all destiny as forecast by this prescient authority. The feelings awakened by these ideas prompt the prayer, the trust, the dread, and the obedience of worship. Examine the ethical qualities of these mental states. Take the single feeling of dread, which I select because it is most readily despised by the philosophy we are considering. I do not instance the coarse terror of the barbarian worshipper; but the fear of a thoughtful faith; the fear that imagines the displeasure of a father, and not the thunderbolt of a demon. Can the human character in the early season of its growth have a stronger fence than that fear? Can human laws, however ably classed and strictly enforced, impose upon the disturbing elements of society so effectual a restraint as the apprehension of an omniscient and almighty Sovereign? And when the advancement of its moral culture raises the mind above the motive of fear, and its own yearning for excellence becomes at once its inspiration and its guard, what can so strongly invigorate that yearning, and help the progress it aspires to command, as the imagined presence and communion of the absolutely perfect Mind? This faith, it must be remembered, does not take us up into mystical and unreal abodes and leave us there: it sends its inspiration through all the channels of conduct, and

strengthens equally every duty. Our citizen and family life is as much indebted to it as our more personal and abstract condition. Now if the worship of the Supreme has no foundation in truth, we have here a vast amount of ethical power, supporting and carrying forward into fuller meaning the precepts of nature, springing from ideas not sanctioned by nature! But there is something to be added stranger still Nature has proved herself unable to support her ethical lessons without the help of the ideas which she is said to disclaim. If I were to affirm that there has never been morality without religion, it would not be easy to confute the statement: but, as we have seen, it may be safely maintained that there has never been a moral community without a religious basis. As for individual instances of moral correctness alleged to be the fruit of atheistic ethics, they may be, for aught we know, the growth of traditional Christian elements, or an early Christian bias. Nothing can be more illusive than the impression that the morality of an atheist is the product of atheism. Morality is the conduct of habits, not of opinions; and although opinions may, in the long run, create habits, good conduct may be settled in periodic duties before opinions can be formed, as in childhood; and an atheist in principle may be a Christian in conduct.

To decide the question, which is gradually becoming the question of questions, whether atheism can of itself produce morality, we must suppose that its philosophy has had a fair trial. If the Bible were to become a dead letter; I do not mean inoperative as a literature; for that assumption is inconceivable; but dead in the sense in which the elegant paganism of Greece is dead, although its fictions still haunt the region of taste, dead as a faith; and the Jehovah of the Old Testament were levelled to the Jove of the Iliad, and the Christ of the Apostles were placed with the Socrates of Plato;

and men were to live and die for generations without an idea of there being anything higher and nobler in the universe than themselves, and without the expectation of another life; and if it were universally accepted that nature's blessings are not bestowed but evolved by material laws; that gratitude for them is a false sentiment; and that, apart from what it pleases itself to ordain, human life has neither duties nor responsibilities: if, I say, these atheistic principles and doctrines ruled the belief and practice of mankind during a period long enough to witness the extinction, if that were possible, of the religions of the world, we might then be able to determine whether the unmixed soil of atheism could grow morality, the tree of life. And even at that time, if anything good were left, it might be unsafe to attribute it to atheism: for religion having rooted itself in man, it would be impossible not to imagine that some tender branch of the felled tree yet remained in the relics of a church, or in the memory of a heart, to keep the old faiths alive.

But if the science of ethics be founded upon the laws of our nature, and no thinker of the materialistic philosophy has hesitated to affirm it; and if the potency of this science is very largely the inspiration of religion; how is it possible to resist the conclusion that religion is equally related to the conditions of our being? Morality is not the culture of experience following upon a revision or correction of the religious impressions that marked the childhood of our race. We have seen that the process was exactly the opposite. The earliest conception of God was ethical. The traditions of pre-historic periods were declarations of ethical law supposed to proceed from the mouth of the Supreme. We are not just now presuming that they did so originate, but merely asserting that religion from the first has been a moral power. If there be any significance in human conduct; any gravity in the

principles of right and wrong; if honesty, responsibility, and order, and the suggestions of union to defend and maintain these conditions, are the laws of the human mind; if, to sum up all in one sentence, there be anything that distinguishes man from organisms of animal life, we are indebted to religion, and to religion only, for its exposition and support. But this statement of the natural union of religion and morality receives weight from another consideration. It is not as if religion had helped us at first, and we had grown to be independent of its teaching and succour; as if we had surpassed our alphabet and could lay our rudiments aside. Our first religious lessons are as difficult to master in these days of advanced education as they were in the infancy of mankind; as difficult, not in the dogmas which they offer to faith, but in the standard which they present to practice. In the march of the human mind we pass and throw into the rear principles and ideas for which we have no further use. We have not yet left behind even the earliest moral standard of religion. It has always appeared to be near as a thing that might be overtaken: but as we approach it, it lifts itself up like the illusion of the traveller's horizon; it is before us to-day, as near and as distant as ever:

> "So pleased at first, the towering Alps we try,
> Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky!
> The eternal snows appear already past,
> And the first clouds and mountains seem the last:
> But those attained, we tremble to survey
> The growing labours of the lengthened way;
> The increasing prospect tires our wandering eyes,
> Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise."

We commend this fact to their consideration who never cease reminding us that the progress of the human race means the falling behind of religious belief. Unless this progress include a corresponding elevation of conduct, progress in other excellencies, in science, in art, in wealth,

in power, does not define the advancement of the race: these attainments may accompany the going backward, the retrogression of the race: for man is not made great by what he knows, but by how much he may be able to control. It is the mastery of what otherwise would conquer him that makes him great. A great government commands and utilises for beneficent ends the forces of society: a great scientist attains the consummation of science when he can bring out of its obscurity some element or force and make it the servant of mankind: and a man, considered as a human being in fellowship by inheritance with those who have gone before, and by sympathy and obligation with those who are contemporary with him, and by transmission with those who will come after him, is great in proportion to the ability by which he can through the sheer force of his will subdue the animal energies of his organisation, and create a guiding power for his life, which in other creatures is secured by the irresponsible mechanism of their nature. A man cannot be great, whatever his intellectual attainments, if he cannot keep himself from wrong-doing; if he is unable to resist the incitements which lead to the ruin of himself and others. We must leave our opponents to account for the fact that man does not naturally possess the controlling power which the structure of his faculties assumes. We know that Christianity illuminates the problem: but those who repudiate this oracle, whether they decline the attempt to explain the anomaly or not, must acknowledge that the training of the human faculties does not necessarily imply the education of moral control. You may have a race of thinkers and poets and artists, and neither themselves nor their admirers one whit the better for their culture: they may not contribute one degree of firmness to the foundations of our safety as families and nations: nay, it is possible to conceive that the thought they generate may

loosen the securities of order and morality. As a man sits in his house in the possession of what Society has agreed to defend for him, his personal safety, the honour of his wife, the parental control of his children, the rights of his property, the civil remedies available for disorders incident to the fluctuations of intercourse, the sentiments of guardianship, of obedience, of unselfish deference, by which his home becomes a well-spring of the noblest happiness of which we are capable, let him ask himself what proportion of these is due to our knowledge of natural laws; and whether they could be entrusted to the protection of scientists and literary men; and whether it is conceivable that any condition equally noble could replace them?

When it is taken for granted by men who assume the direction of modern thought, that religious faith is yielding to the demonstrations of exact knowledge, and will prove, like other illusions, but a temporary possession of mankind, it is time for us to consider what other moral power will take its place. Now religious belief has never been worth anything except in so far as it has helped the moral condition of the world: and it has done this by rebuking and subduing the natural selfishness of the human mind. It has made men live for each other, rather than for themselves: and by affirming man's immortality, it has set an estimate on human life which has had a marked influence upon the jurisprudence of nations. The nature and measure of this influence may be inferred from the history of those governments which are scarcely touched by the authority of religion. We shall find, with probably no exception, that in all countries human life and human concerns are weighed together and reckoned to have the same value: that if religion has not stamped upon life the assay mark of immortality, it is worth just so much and no more as it can bring to the State. It has no personal

sacredness; and is covered by no shield except the precarious defence of class-interests. Infancy is cheap; age is cheap; and the impotencies of poverty, instead of being a charge upon the sympathy and care of the strong, are a burden to be shaken off; and the tenderest, the grandest sentiments of our nature die in the blight of selfishness. But where civil law is based upon the fact that life is, in itself, a gift of infinite responsibility, a corresponding value attaches to everything that affects it; and the slightest, the most fugitive human affairs are admitted into the scale of public estimation. England exceeds other nations in earnestness of religious sentiment; and nowhere is the life of man so sheltered as it is here: it is too grand a possession to need the protection of class or rank: it is taken as it is and folded up within the provisions of the constitution because it is considered to be a divine thing; its freedom, its education, its morality, its happiness, are regarded by the State in the light of a divine trust. Materialists and a certain school of politicians may laugh at this statement as a somewhat stale superstition. The reply is close at hand, and cannot be refuted, that whether it be a superstition or not, it is the true explanation of the humanity, the equity, the power, and the majesty of English law.

Let it then be remembered that when religious faith is left behind, we abandon with it our supposed immortality, and those sentiments of human worth and dignity inspired by it which, as we have seen, so closely affect the humanity of states; we leave behind a divine law of right and wrong, which by placing public morals upon immutable foundations has saved us from the capricious standards of expediency: we leave behind a certain class of thought which has been the only intellectual food of the masses of civilised countries, and which, by refining their emotions and absorbing and

elevating their leisure, has compensated their lack of culture and made them readily amenable to law and accessible to virtue. More than this; we depart from those standards of belief upon which rests the credibility of much of our history. A spirit of suspicion will infect historical criticism, and weaken the authority of experience: and that exquisite arrangement which compensates for the limits of exactness by making probability the ground of testimony, will be defeated, and the generous faith between man and man so conducive to the goodwill and business of society will be rudely shaken, and perhaps overthrown. It may be supposed that in these sentences I exaggerate the results of the negation of faith; that I am copying the images of fancy, instead of following the steps and sequences of reasoning: but no man who shall work out for himself the problem of the human race bereft through a succession of ages of faith in God, will hastily dismiss these statements as improbable. I do not pretend that with the expiration of faith, there will be the contemporary extinction of everything belonging to faith. The glories of the setting will linger when the luminary has disappeared: but the declining orb must take its splendours with it, and in the next watch not a trace of the day will be seen.

The materialistic philosophy has one reply to all this; and we admit that it is terribly conclusive: if the correct expounding of nature should involve the gradual displacement of the dogmas upon which religion is built, we may leave nature to provide for conditions consequent upon her advancement. To this unanswerable dictum we reverently submit. If religion and science conduct us to diametrically opposite conclusions, they cannot both be true. We confess, moreover, that religion is faith in the unseen, and that science is exact knowledge: and if philosophy can demonstrate the absurdity of any particular belief, it is our duty to renounce that belief, whatever

the disavowal may cost us. The tone of scientific polemics makes me suspect that our philosophic observers do not credit us with the love of truth apart from the love of sect. Let us hope that a pure desire for the truth and for the truth only is not all on their side; that some of us strive to follow her leadings with a devotion as untainted by self as that of the most enthusiastic scientists. And if they and we are simply eager to discover that which is true, why should we enter the arena of discussion in the spirit of adversaries, and with bitterness and intolerance instead of arguments? In former years the scientific spirit was not less bold in its generalisations than it is now: but it was modest in the tone of its researches; and it cannot yet afford to dispense with modesty.

We are compelled to add that the hardest school of theological dogmatists will not furnish better specimens of arrogance than certain of our modern materialists. But neither in theology nor in science will this temper help the onward movement of truth. We may force a discussion by substituting dogma for reasoning, and assume a triumph in the language of superiority and disdain. But this kind of progress is only imaginary: we have to come back and do our work over again. In the unquestionable victories of science we rejoice: and are content to have our own note of admiration lost in the popular acclaim: to be proud of its gains without, it may be, an accurate estimate of their advantage. But we can discriminate between science and speculation. When the materialist talks about the ultimate atom, we know as much about that obscure creature as he does: when he attempts to define force and motion and space and ether, we know that he may as well claim scientific precision for his dreams, as for an account of properties which have hitherto eluded, and will for some time to come elude, the keenest, the most patient, and the best supported observation. Let it be understood once for all

that we regard the labour of those who are reclaiming land for truth from the illimitable wastes of the unknown as the highest and most ennobling pursuit of man. Apart from the success of scientific enterprise, the enterprise itself brings infinite gain to the mind. But we know that one of the dangers of a too eager chase is the mistaking the *mirage* of our own fancy for the goal of our hopes. Suppose, for example, we accept the doctrine of causation as taught by the materialistic philosophy, which explains that we are ignorant of any other principle of causation than that of invariable succession: that simple antecedence is the definition of a cause; causal force being unknown to science. If upon this ground the materialist denies the possibility of a miracle, that is, an effect other than the ordinary sequences of nature, and he supports his argument by affirming that such an anomaly has never been known, his view is a presumption; a statement it is impossible to prove; since it supposes an extent of knowledge it is impossible for him to command. Now religion, that form of it, at least, which has the firmest hold upon the mind of the world, rests upon miracle. Disprove the miracle, and the entire system vanishes in air. There are men who affect to believe that Christianity without the miracle is true. But we need not stop by the way to assail this position which has not even the shadow of a defence: for in seeking to unite theology and science, it outrages both by sacrificing religion and common sense. We must not shrink from asserting that in spite of the high moral aims of the New Testament and the splendid literature of the Old, if we deny their claim to the supernatural, we admit their imposture. When the scientist affirms that in nature, so far as men have been able to understand its laws, miraculous innovations are unknown, we may believe him: he has delivered a scientific judgment. But when he insists upon the

impossibility of a miracle, and maintains that no kind or amount of testimony can make it credible, he is eminently unscientific. It is a fact that Christianity exists: it is equally true that it must stand or fall with the miracle upon which it is based: it is no less certain that the history of the miracle has been deemed sufficiently credible to warrant an implicit faith; and that the moral power of the system built upon it is due to that faith. If this great Christian deposit of doctrine and life has done any good in the world, the world is indebted to its supernatural pretensions. These are facts: and if a miracle is impossible, they rest upon nothing and are worth nothing.

Again, in applying the law of causation, as thus explained, to mental phenomena, the self or personality of man has been denied. The *ego* has been resolved into passing groups of psychical states; and what we have considered as constituting the responsibility of the will, the self-determining power which arbitrates between contending suggestions and impulses, is a purely mechanical victory in a conflict between two ideal motor changes, one of which, from having a preponderating inducement, becomes real. This sounds like trifling; but it goes under the name of science. If it be science, the whole edifice of morals is a dream. We must dismiss the testimonies of consciousness and the venerable associations of the future life; and I envy the sensibility of no man who can part with errors so precious without a pang. But, so far from belonging in any sense of the term to science, the notion that the thinking entity in man, which is man, is a group of mental conditions is simply the necessary close or sum of a psychological hypothesis. If all the eminent thinkers of the day were united in supporting this melancholy speculation, I should hesitate to be put to death by an hypothesis, and against the verdict of nearly all the thinking and wisdom of the past. But it so

happens that in psychology there are nearly as many schools as there are writers. And when in that finest and most subtle region, human consciousness, which like the sea closes up the furrow of the ship that passes through it, and is trackless to every new adventurer, men pretend to have discovered the exact position in nature of the mind, and when no two of the explorers agree as to what they have discovered, it will be equally prudent and scientific to keep nearer home, and to abide, for the present, in the old anchorage of a human soul that does not shift into new centres of obligation every moment, but is accountable for its yesterdays and its to-morrows.

This is our position: there is a sphere of which materialistic science is mistress. She has won it by honest and patient toil: she has so made it her own, that it can never be retaken from her: she is adding to its area every year, and there need be no limit to her conquests, and we hail the queen of an ever-extending realm. But beyond that realm there lie problems that escape the tests of scientific experiment; questions it may not be unuseful for science to consider, since they border her own world: but when her followers affect to master them; and claim as belonging to her, and assured to her, what has never been verified by those instruments of inspection which are the weapons of her warfare; they simply describe not her ground at all, but the intangible untravelled region that surrounds it. Much of that unworthy panic which recent philosophical speculations have awakened in the Christian world, and nearly all the mischief which a semi-philosophic literature has done to the Christian sentiment of the age, have arisen from the habit of confounding the discoveries with the guesses of science; and not considering that the guesses that presume the overthrow of religion are not the conjectures of the present limits of research, which may by and by turn out to be true, but

the mere frolic of the scientific imagination, as when Professor Tyndall tells us that by an intellectual necessity he crossed the boundary of experience and discerned in matter "the promise and potency of all terrestrial life."[1] In affirming the claims of religion upon the credence of mankind, we do not complain that their credibility should be examined by every available test; we do not regret that an accurate and resolute criticism has dispelled some of the illusions which, through the party enthusiasm and selfishness of certain Christian men, have gathered about the traditions and faith of the Church. Let every illusion depart! Truth is stronger when she is untrammelled and walks alone. But while we dread no ordeal, whether the analysis of criticism, or the inexorable explorations of time, we shall not, in dispensing with dreams which have possibly invested the substance of religion, accept as worthy of our concern the dreams of philosophy. Let us on both sides have done with dreaming, and Christianity and Science may be co-witnesses of the truth!

As against the position of Modern Atheism, that we cannot know that there is a spiritual and personal God, we have quoted the earliest non-Christian testimonies of the human mind, delivered at a time when there was sufficient culture to give authority to thought, and yet prior to the age of expositions, systems, and schools. We have shown that the simple phenomena of nature awakening the intuitions and drawing out the reasoning of the primitive races, impressed upon them two ideas: first, that a primal and intelligent Mind originated the Universe; secondly, that the thinking part of man lives on after death. We have made it equally clear that whether these ideas are true or not, they were apparently derived from the same sources and formed by the same

[1] Address at Belfast, p. 55. Longmans, 1874.

process as other ideas which are true and have never been questioned. And the argument that proves this unity of source is the organic connection between religious faith which is the subject of dispute, and the ethics of personal and social duty which are not disputed. It has been shown that theology in some form or other has always inspired the morality of conduct: that where in any instance, notably in Buddism, the two have not been equally obvious, a little exploring below the surface has discovered their union. It has been presumed that morality is the index and consummation of human progress; and that the excellence of everything should be measured by its contribution of help to the culture of purer conduct in individuals and in States. If in every past age and among every people the chief agent in advancing this culture has been some kind of religious belief, then, supposing all forms of religious belief disappear, where are the principles by which human life shall be guided, and the new inspiration by which our struggles to attain the true and the good shall be sustained? If it be replied that transmitted habits and traditions, and the body of ethical literature possessed by all educated nations, and higher developments of human intelligence, will continue to furnish a guarantee for moral progress: the answer is not a little perplexing: first, this guarantee is mainly composed of the religious sentiment impressed upon the manners, laws, examples, and languages of a thousand generations: secondly, if religion is not true now, it was never true; the religious sentiment was ever false; and the guarantee reckoned upon ought never to have been. Moreover it has been clearly pointed out that if you leave religion in the rear, and carry on morality, you cut a branch from a stock, and the branch having no further base of life, its decay is only a matter of time.

This is the problem which stands in front of modern atheism: the ethical necessities of the human race, the homogeneous origin of religious impressions and ethical laws, and the moral consequences of their threatened divorce.

But we have been brought to this conclusion respecting the difficulties of atheism without having considered the claims of Christianity at all. Whatever we have alleged against materialism would remain in undiminished force if there were no Christianity. Our references to Christian revelation and Christian work have been incidental and inclusive. The argument against atheism has been sustained by the rudiments of religious thought; the lispings of a child—devotion in the cradle days of the world. And the fact that the pure morality of these breathings has never yet been surpassed by the conduct of mankind, is of itself a presumption that atheism does not mean an advancement but an abnormal condition of the intellect. But if these rudiments and their elevating action upon mankind are sufficient to discredit atheistic doctrines, we have, as it seems to us, a demonstration of their absurdity in the origin and history of the Christian faith. In our review of other faiths, whatever testimony we have adduced in support of a personal God, the immortality of the soul, and the ethical power of religious belief, is the merest outline, a rude draft, of Christian evidence; valuable because of its antiquity, its universality, and the independent character of its witness; but wanting in completeness of system, and in the more important argument of historic development. The primitive races stretched out their thoughts, as blind men put out their hands to feel after an object which something within them suggests to be near. They tell us what they pursued; what they hoped they had found. They believed that somewhere there was a greater, a purer, than themselves; one who could redeem them from frailty, and cover them in

danger. They were certainly baffled in their attempt to image to themselves the Supreme Cause of all things, whose existence they were compelled nevertheless to acknowledge; and they took refuge in anthropomorphic conceptions, and laid the burden of their life upon subordinate divinities. But of these divinities they always speak as if they were simply a provision for the immediate wants of worship, until the time, believed in by many, longed for by all, when a direct revelation from the Hidden One Himself would satisfy the reason of man and gladden the desire of nations.

Now if we examine the literature of the ancient faiths, and extract what is most excellent and noble in their conceptions of God, what is truest in their descriptions of man, what is grandest in their ideal of human character; and bring these *excerpta* into parallelism with corresponding Christian revelations, we have before us identity of origin and contrast in expression, such as we find between fossil remains of portions of the human body discovered in different strata by the diligence of geology, and the perfect living body of a man. In the one case you put together such parts as you have found, just enough to establish structural affinity, but, in the absence of important pieces, with too many gaps to enable you to determine questions of stature and race; and in the other you have the entire human frame, not artificially collected, but grown in the matured symmetry of nature, in harmony with all living things, perfect in the functions and embellishments of life, and with the superb dignity of mind. Such is the union and such the disparity between the scattered thoughts of paganism and the coherent delineations of Christian theology.

But the Christian conception of God, so rational in its foundation, so purely spiritual in its nature, so consistent and finished in its composition, is not a growth. We have spoken

at large in this lecture on rudimentary ideas of God. The Christian doctrine is not the evolution of these elements. These elements are parts of the disintegration of that doctrine. From the first the Christian idea of the Supreme has been perfect in the sense of being complete. It found its exact expression in the words of our Great Teacher, "*God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*" But this was the Hebrew idea long before the birth of Jesus: and those who deny its supernatural origin may explain why in the progressive culture of ages the Hebrew thought, on a subject which has attracted to itself universal inspection, and under circumstances more favourable to development than any other idea, should have received no addition within, at least, the historic memory of man. It is not clearer than it was; not more refined; not more in harmony with scientific positions. It stands out in the hemisphere of knowledge like the sun; touching and improving all thought, but itself untouched. It has been accused of *anthropomorphism.* If by this word is meant the metaphysical necessity of conceiving of mind only as we are conscious of mind ourselves, we cannot escape the charge. And how we can think of matter except in so far as our own mind makes us cognisant of its properties, is not easier to learn than how so obvious a truism can invalidate the Christian idea of God. But if it be affirmed that our conception is modelled upon a human pattern by a process of exaggerating to infinity human qualities, the allegation is baseless. The Biblical doctrine of the spirituality of God is taught with the explicitness of definition. When the scientist is driven by the logic of his facts to a First Cause; and the metaphysician by the logic of his reasoning to the Absolute; is their conception of the mystery more in accord with the requirements of scientific reasoning than St. Paul's Absolute:—"dwelling in light

which no man can approach unto: whom no man hath seen or can see"? As for the human aspects of the Biblical conception, they prevented it from receding into an abstraction by accommodating its form to the limited conditions of the worshipper, who was thus able to conceive of a personal God; and they prepared the world for the great mystery and glory of time, God "manifest in the flesh."

And here let me remind those who impugn the deity of Jesus, that, assuming for the moment that the union of the infinite and the finite in one consciousness is thinkable, the teaching and life of Jesus are not only commensurate with what the human mind has ever conceived, under any hypothesis, to be predicable of God, but they bring into light that which no thought had ever been able to penetrate; God's relation to man. They accomplish what, humanly speaking, is the greatest intellectual exploit known in the history of the mind; they bring the Supreme Spirit of the universe into minute personal intercourse with all the races of men without staining the conception by the slightest blemish of coarseness. The "Our Father" of the Christian is, in the causal element of the conception, as purely spiritual a thought as science ever placed at the imagined *ultima Thule* of her analysis; but the personality which makes it a distinct existence to the worshipper, and the attributes which exalt it to parental authority, guardianship, and love, bring it unsullied into the homes of the world, with all its grandeur, its purity, its tenderness, and its unexampled teaching power; connecting the heavens which "declare the glory of God" with the inner word of every man's conscience. Herein is the second and greater argument for its supernatural origin; its corresponding ethical power; a power in exact proportion to its original and unchanging clearness; and inexplicable upon any other ground than that which we claim for it. You may dispute the form

of the conception: it may be anthropomorphic; it may be unthinkable; it may be the dream of the first sleep of the imagination; you may shut us up in absolute limitations and show that our reasoning cannot be sound; but will you follow us as we take this conception of God away from the debateable ground of metaphysics into the practical life of the world? If it be the noblest function of knowledge to make that world better, to make human nature fair, not by putting anything upon it, but by making it grow its own beauty by new laws of purity and benevolence, and by hopes of illimitable progress, has the operation of any knowledge accomplished so wide and deep a regeneration of mankind as that of Christ's revelation of "Our Father"? And may we not add to this statement that all knowledge which has been working in the same direction is an imperfect apprehension of the truths of which Christianity is the perfect complement?

In every age it has been, I will not say the pastime, but, a serious task of the educated imagination to conceive a perfect man, a perfect society, and a perfect government: and men have been glad to escape for a while from the hard realities of human failure, to find relief in the sublime reveries of the muse, and to mingle with the pictured excellencies of poetry. Yet the helplessness of the attempt to bring the ideal out of dreamland and make it a living thing is as remarkable as the ideal itself is noble. But Christianity embodies the vision; and in the bare practical human life of Jesus touches a purity of which no muse ever dreamt. No single life has been so widely known and so keenly examined: and however diverse the judgments of criticism on His supernatural claims, no man qualifies his reverence for the morality of Jesus: no man hesitates to accept the model of His life: no man expects to see another like Him. As for His teaching, its intense illumination casts a light upon every moral question that

earlier thinkers had left unanswered. Life had no meaning for us until He explained it. It had been the wise man's enigma and the statesman's despair. But He untwisted the threads of the puzzle; separated the glory from the shame; the true from the false; the permanent from the fleeting. He was the first to show that the imagination of excellence means more than poetry; that in human nature it means prophecy; and by fulfilling the prediction in Himself, He proved that the prophet's hope never need be the prophet's shame. Let me ask any student of His words and acts, and no one but a student has the right of judgment, whether, for the guidance of a man within the hidden world of himself, or in relation to the world of human life without, there may not be found in the teaching of Jesus every principle that human nature can want to recover and perpetuate in all conceivable relations and conditions, purity, happiness, and progress; whether we want anything that is not there; and whether what all have agreed to consider the best things we have, have not come from there? It is not that Christ has shed a light upon a side or angle of life: His teaching envelopes us; and everything belonging to us grows into nobler proportions when it happens to be quickened by His words. It will hardly be denied by men of every school that the human mind has wrought its highest moral achievements under His inspiration: that the human character has touched an altitude unknown in the history of men before He was known.

If there be anything left in the world to inspire the hope of better days to come; anything to relieve the sight, as the eye wanders over the surface of human life, torn up by the wild lusts of the heart, and made hideous by crime and suffering; where selfishness knows no pity, and sorrow no hope; where ignorance like the pall of a black cloud hides its bright destiny from the mind, it is the active goodness of an army of

workers in the world; in organised bodies, in irregular forces, in scattered units, remote from each other, unknown to each other, sometimes denouncing each other; but all labouring to lift up and bear away the human woes of the earth; in literature simplifying great principles of conduct, and circulating noble ideas; in education, striving to cut off the entail of depravity from the children of the poor, and to endow them with a new freehold of knowledge and virtue; in charity, in countless ministries of alleviation and succour.

Let any man consider whence this goodness springs and who sustains it; and then let him measure the proportion of it that comes from Christian sources and is worked by Christian energies. Let him separate the knowledge, the benevolence, the purity, and every operation that can be traced to Christ, and then reckon up what is left. Let him consider the fences of equity and peace, the strongholds of liberty and mercy, which have been reared upon the basis of Christian doctrine. Let him include in his review the unwritten accumulation of eighteen centuries of Christian history, traditions, associations, influences, manners, many of them too subtle for analysis and definition, but no less playing their part in the formation of personal and national character; and, finally, let him conceive what would be the condition of mankind if the doctrines, institutions, and literature of Christianity, not as they have been narrowed by bigotry, or alloyed with human and imperfect ideas, but in their own simple purity, were not opposed, but allowed to work out their purpose and complete their task within and upon every man, and every family and nation of men: and then he may be able to educe the ethical position of Jesus, and will discover that as a moral power in the earth, that position is, in comparison with forces of the same class, equally unapproachable and indispensable.

We will judge this great Teacher and Expounder of the

mystery of religion and philosophy, who brought the remote abstraction of a First Cause into near and paternal fellowship with men, I say we will judge Him, if you please, with the tentative temper with which you deliver your scientific judg ments. We say, He is true, so far as we know: He is without fault, so far as we know: the pretensions which He advanced with reference to Himself have never been falsified, so far as we know: and therefore we dare to claim for Him all that He affirms to be His right. It would be a trespass equally against science and charity, to suppose that He could be true to us, and false to Himself. When He utters a word or performs an act which we cannot reconcile with usage or nature, we shall not allow our ignorance to make us hesitate to accept it, unless we are cautioned by the experience of what we already know of Him. We take this scientific canon with us into the vast and only partially developed region of Christ's mind and work. We ask that they may be explored as nature is explored: that the student shall not repudiate mystery, but knock at it and wait: that he shall not seek to verify a theory, but begin his work with the spirit of a child who has no theories, and patiently, earnestly, and honestly, make the truth the goal of his research; and having reached it, dare to face the consequences of maintaining it.

Here then the conception of a personal God attains its complete expression in the doctrine of Jesus; and its corresponding ethical power in the circulation of that doctrine: and neither the one nor the other can be explained from the atheistic position of the materialist. You may start from any premises within the ground of human nature and find your way to the conclusion we have reached. But how have we gained it?

1. We have collected the theistic impressions of mankind.
2. We have shown that their antiquity, their similarity,

and their imperial place in the motives, the restraints, and the education of life, prove that they have a root in human nature: for these are the signs that attest the truth of other impressions which no one has ever doubted. To allege against them that they convey no exact knowledge is an objection of no weight, unless it can be shown that other impressions convey exact knowledge: the fact being that exact knowledge is unknown in human life.

3. We have observed that when the attempt has been made to construct a system of life without a basis of theistic faith, it has not been able to work in permanent separation from it; that the religious sentiment after awhile has recovered its position and found its deity.

4. We have seen that within the manifold shapes which religious belief has assumed, there has been a central notion, in several instances a distinct idea, of one Supreme Mind, the original of existence; and that the influence of religion upon morals has been in proportion to the clearness of this particular conception: as if the mind attained its true position when it ascended above intermediate powers and sought the presence and sanctions of the last, the ultimate authority.

5. We have discovered that the hope of a future state has been the natural corollary of faith in God: and that these two doctrines, laying hold of the common belief, have created sentiments of responsibility, mutual respect, and kindness, which have inspired the statutes and spirit of governments, and moulded the institutions and tinctured the manners and speech of the people.

Lastly, in detecting elementary forms of faith, tracking them to their source and then returning and following their evolutionary processes into systems of belief, we have remarked that whatever they discover to us of clearness in the proof of their divinity, of value in their expositions of human nature,

of power and triumph in their ethical service for mankind, is found in its perfect condition and illustration in the religion of Jesus: showing that they are not independent faiths, in different stages of maturity and equally divine, but are related in their imperfect germs to the tree of life, and destined to have their crude nourishment superseded, as the branches of that tree extend their arms and shake down their fruit and their leaves for the sustenance and healing of the nations.

It follows from all this that whatever may be said for Atheism, it has no place in man. If it is in our nature, to be hereafter perfected, we should be able by this time to read the prophecy of its ultimate maturity in some germinal forms of life. Where are these signs of structural vitality? If atheism is destined to take charge of the universal mind, of its aspirations, its sorrows, and its resources, we may expect to see the indications of this sublime consummation in earlier stages of growth. May we find them in any existing Government? As yet there is no nation that is ruled upon purely atheistic principles. May we seek them in colleges and schools? As yet there is no educational institution which apart from technical and scientific instruction teaches the morals of life upon a professedly atheistic basis. May we discover them in literature? There are works which teach a philosophy that excludes God: there are books inspired by the atheistic spirit: but, throwing out of our estimate publications which no honest school of thought would care to adopt, the productions of the sceptical school that seriously and earnestly address themselves to the instruction and enlightened amusement of the public cannot as yet be said to comprise a literature. Do these promises of the future reign of atheism discover themselves in family life? The question is not, are there ungodly families? but are there families whose unity, culture, and happiness are founded upon the

repudiation of religious belief? If there are, do they represent a sufficient amount of solid result to take them out of the category of experiments, of which we have known several whose abnormal form and early death plainly showed that nature never intended them to live? Nay, atheism has no living organism in family life; and a system which has had disciples and workers in every past age and in every land, and is not found to-day among the reforming agencies of the world, bears upon its unnatural aspects and upon its separation from the vitalities and harmonies of nature and of man, the prophecy of ultimate extinction. It is a plant "which my Father hath not planted," and shall be plucked up by Him whose "memorial" is still with us and shall be, in ever increasing ascendency, unto all generations!

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